



# International students' perspectives of Malaysian English teachers' spoken English

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## ABSTRACT

Numerous studies comparing native and non-native English teachers have found that ESL students prefer native teachers for teaching speaking skills and pronunciation. In other words, non-native teachers are viewed as less superior in matters related to spoken language. This study explores international students' views on spoken English of Malaysian teachers in English language classrooms. 81 international students who were attending English language classes as a preparation for university programmes at a Malaysian university participated in the study. The students were given a short writing task which required them to rate as well as stated their views on their Malaysian teachers' spoken English in terms of speech rate, pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax, intelligibility, *nativeness* and acceptability for global communication. The study found that the international students considered the variety of Malaysian English used in the classroom as highly intelligible with high ratings for speech rates, vocabulary and sentence structures. Malaysian English is also viewed as highly acceptable for global communication. Although the teachers' spoken language was rated lower for pronunciation and *nativeness* compared to other traits confirming the views that non-native teachers are perceived as less proficient in pronunciation compared to the other skills, the ratings were still high indicating that in general, the acrolectal variety of Malaysian English as spoken in English classes is reasonably well accepted by other non-native speakers.

**Keywords:** English varieties; native English accent; non-native English accent,

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## INTRODUCTION

Despite the challenge to the native and non-native speaker dichotomy, there is still much interest in comparing native and non-native teachers and evaluating their contributions to English language teaching. Among others, studies have been carried out on English as a second language (ESL) or English as a foreign language (EFL) students' reactions to native teachers who come from what Kachru (1985) termed the inner circle countries like America or England and non-native teachers who are from the outer or expanding circle countries like Malaysia or Japan respectively. In

general, native teachers are perceived to be better in teaching speaking skills, pronunciation and English culture (Coskun, 2013; Diaz, 2015; Madrid & Cañado, 2004; Walkinshaw & Duong, 2012). Non-native teachers are said to emphasise students' learning process (Reves & Medgyes, 1994) and use their shared first language (L1) to facilitate the teaching of grammatical rules. In other words, native and non-native teachers are appreciated for different teaching skills. While being more effective in some aspects of teaching than native teachers, non-native teachers are

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considered less superior in communication and spoken language.

The present study focuses on the spoken language of teachers who speak the Malaysian English variety, an outer circle variety. Malaysia English teachers are often non-native speakers of English who speak English with some influence from the local languages and cultures. As an indigenized variety, Malaysian English has its own nativised features which are different from standard inner circle varieties. The degree of differences may vary depending on the speakers' proficiency and sociolectal variety. Malaysian English has been said to have three dialectal varieties (Azirah & Tan, 2012; Baskaran, 1994, 2005; Muniandy, Nair, Shanmugam, Ahmad, & Noor, 2010). The 'acrolect' is used in the Malaysian education system and believed to be a standard version of English. The 'mesolect' is used in informal or casual contexts among Malaysians. The 'basilect' is considered a pidgin version used in markets. As the language used by teachers is in an educational setting, it is presumed to be the acrolectal variety or the high social dialect which has been described (for example by Baskaran, 1994) to be the standard language for national and international purposes. The question that arises then is how intelligible is the 'acrolectal' variety to other speakers. Baba (2013) for example, based on his experience with Malaysian English speakers in general, claimed that they tend to simplify the sounds system rendering them unintelligible to native and other second language speakers. Considering this and that the teachers' social dialect may vary from situation to situation, the present study examines spoken English of Malaysian teachers from the perspective of international students who are foreign or second language speakers of English and do not share the same first language as the teachers. This study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the international students' views on the linguistic dimension of Malaysian English variety used by English teachers in the classroom in terms of speech rate, pronunciation, vocabulary, and structure?
2. What are the international students' views on the status dimension of Malaysian English variety used by English teachers in the classrooms in terms of intelligibility, *nativeness*, and acceptability for global communication?
3. Do the students' views on the English teachers' spoken English vary by their first language?

### **Native and non- native English teachers**

A general perception among learners of EFL and ESL is that native English teachers are the preferred ideal teachers. This perception gives rise to a large and growing body of literature comparing Native English-Speaking Teachers (NESTs) and Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) from the perceptions of students or/and teachers. Findings from several studies

on students have suggested that both NESTs and NNESTs have distinct strength and weaknesses in teaching.

In one study, Lasagabaster and Sierra (2002) who investigated 76 undergraduates from the University of the Basque Country, Spain found that in general, the Spanish students preferred native-speaking teachers (NSTs) as their teachers though the students indicated a stronger preference for non-native speaking teachers (NNESTs) for their ability to teach the structure of the language explicitly. NSTs were perceived as less 'strict' with structures as long as the communication was not obscure. NSTs were preferred for pronunciation, speaking, vocabulary, and culture and civilisation. Students were neutral regarding reading, listening, and attitudes to learning the language. As students progressed through primary, secondary and tertiary education levels, the preferences for NSTs became stronger. Students of English Studies at the tertiary level indicated a stronger preference for NSTs in comparison to those in secondary schools.

Another study by Gurkan and Yuksel (2012) on 26 preparatory and 46 regular students of English in Turkey, found that NESTs were preferred as the students perceived them as a model of correct and native English with more flexibility in teaching and were more creative and informal. Most importantly, they have the edge in teaching pronunciation, culture and learning about the target language culture. On the other hand, NNESTs were perceived as having better ways of teaching language learning strategies as they were able to anticipate and prevent students' difficulties in learning. They were also more sensitive to their learning process and could help by using the mother tongue and helped develop the students' grammar. NNESTs and NESTs were preferred for different abilities though NESTs were generally better preferred.

In a different study, Alseweed (2012) studied the perceptions of 169 Saudi male students at Qassim University of their native and non-native English teachers' influence on them. The students were taught by both NESTs and NNESTs for two semesters. 89 per cent of the learners reported that they preferred to learn English from NESTs because of the more relaxing learning environment. Students' responses clearly indicated that native teachers were more lenient of their language errors which led them to prefer NESTs more. They preferred the teaching strategies used by the native teachers more and this preference is stronger as students progressed further in their studies.

Diaz (2015) who studied 78 students from three years of study at the University of Rennes in French Brittany reported that NESTs and NNESTs were preferred for different linguistic skills by different levels of studies. For example, first-year students preferred NNESTs whereas second and third-year students preferred both NESTs and NNESTs for teaching grammar. First-year students preferred both groups of teachers while second and third-year students preferred the NESTs for teaching reading comprehension.

However, all students from all years preferred NEST for pronunciation, reading and oral exercises. In general, the students preferred NESTs as they progressed from year one to year three.

However, Madrid and Cañado (2004) who studied 459 students and 35 teachers from three education levels: primary, secondary, tertiary found that the preference for NESTs was statistically insignificant even though the students became more interested in native speakers as they progressed through the levels. The NESTs were preferred for their ability to teach the language for the higher level of study whereas NNESTs were chosen because they could teach grammar and understood the difficulties in learning a foreign language in the elementary level. This shows the advantages of having both groups of teachers.

Walkinshaw and Duong (2012) who studied 50 Vietnamese students' perceptions on their beliefs about the preference of learning English from native speakers and non-native speakers found that most students preferred native speakers only for their input in the pronunciation of the foreign language. In other areas like the experience of teaching, teaching qualifications, friendliness, enthusiasm, ability to deliver interesting and informative classes and respect of students' local culture, students did not show a strong preference for native over non-native teachers.

The studies show that most students prefer NESTs in general as NESTs were regarded as the ideal model for correct English. NNESTs were less favourable, but the students were aware of the advantages of having non-native English teachers especially those who share the same first language (L1) as theirs. This is an indication that students are showing maturity in accepting English as an international language. It also reflects the reality that English is spoken by more non-native speakers than native speakers. English is spoken by 1,500 million people worldwide, but only 375 million are native speakers (McCarthy, 2015).

Since NESTs were preferred for their native communicative and linguistic abilities, the following section reviews some studies on ESL or EFL students' perception of native and non-native English accents including their own accents.

### **Perception of English accents**

Kawanami and Kawanami (2009) studied 12 Japanese students' opinions on the accents of six different speakers using the Aural Acceptability Judgment Task (AAJT). The results show that these students did not accept or even tolerate English spoken by speakers who were either from the Outer Circle or the Expanding Circle. These students still exhibited a strong desire to speak with a native-like pronunciation which can either be Received Pronunciation (RP- British English) or Standard American English. They associated these accents with high social status and legitimacy. However, the students also showed admiration of Japanese speakers who managed to speak using native-like pronunciation and indicated that they would like to

emulate this speaker. The students did have a preference for their own accented English but with the more native-like accent.

Kelch and Santana-Williamson (2002) found that although 56 students (47 of the students were Spanish-speaking, 8 Korean-speaking and 1 Vietnamese-speaking) from a community college at Southern California preferred to learn from NESTs, only 70 % of them could identify the native accents. 40 % of them identified Portuguese English as Native English, 39 % identified Southern American English as native English, and 27 % identified British English as a native accent. These findings indicate that the students were unable to discern between native and non-native accents as more students perceive speakers of Portuguese English as native speakers in comparison to speakers of Southern American English and British English. Not only that, as students were mainly from Latin-accented background, the preference for Portuguese English was far higher than for other varieties.

Tokumoto and Shibata (2011) asked Japanese students, 46 Korean students and 32 Malaysian students about their own English accents. It was found that the Japanese and Korean students did not really identify their accented English as a standard form of English which can be used in an international business context. On the contrary, the Malaysian students were confident of their English and its use in the international context. This is supported by Zainab, Ain Nadzimah, and Chan (2014) in a study of the perception of 120 Malaysian university students who have been exposed to several accents. There were six traits investigated: clarity, intelligence, confidence, friendliness, carefulness with English, familiarity, fluency and sophistication. Results show that Malaysian university students evaluated non-native English accents, the majority of which are Malaysian accents more positively due to in-group accent familiarity. Malaysian students also were able to identify the different accents except for the confusion between British and American accents.

This contradicts McGee (2016)'s findings who investigated Malaysian students in the British Council, Penang in Malaysia. The accents were studied for these traits: friendliness, attractiveness, intelligence, education level, intelligibility, familiarity with the accent, desire for accent, desire for the teacher and the desired classroom model. In terms of friendliness and attractiveness, students chose American and Scottish accents as most friendly and attractive whereas English accent as the least friendly and attractive. For intelligence and education level, American and Scottish accents were perceived the best. In terms of a desired accent, teacher and classroom model, again American and Scottish accents were chosen. This contradicts the general questionnaire where 89% of students chose the English accent as their desired classroom model. As for Malaysian English, it was rated the highest for intelligibility and familiarity along with American English accent while English accent was rated the lowest. Most students felt Malaysian English was an

inferior variety of English although there are some who believed that it could be used in the community for social purposes.

The studies indicate that some students do not prefer non-native accents compared to native accents while others are more supportive of non-native accents including their own accent. Malaysians seem to be mixed in their views on Malaysian English accent too. Some are more positive than others that Malaysian English accent, like a native variety, is suitable for international communication.

The present study takes a different approach from previous studies on English teachers which examined various aspects related to non-native teachers or both native and non-native teachers. This study focusses on the spoken language of NNESTs only with a specific reference to international ESL/EFL students' views on Malaysian English used by their teachers in the classrooms, a non-native variety that is not their own and unfamiliar to them. At the university where the study was carried out, English is used as a medium of instruction. Students who join the university are expected to have a certain level of English proficiency. Those who do not have the required level of proficiency will have to attend English proficiency classes. Teachers teaching these proficiency classes are mostly Malaysian Malays and a few Chinese and Indians speaking Malaysian English. This paper would like to find out how the international students in these classes, who are foreign or second language speakers perceive the spoken language of their teachers whose L1 they do not share.

## **METHODS**

### **Participants**

A total of 81 international students who have been learning English for at least a semester in Malaysia participated in the study. There were 53 (65.4%) male students and 28 (34.6 %) female students. 8 (9.9 %) students were 18 years old and below, 46 (56.8 %) students were between 19 to 23 years old, 17 (21.0 %) students were between 24 to 28 years old and 9 (11.1%) students were 29 years old or older. Out of these 81 students, 21 (25.9 %) students came from China followed by Bangladesh and Indonesia (with 11 each, 13.6 %), 6 (7.4 %) students from Thailand, 4 (4.9 %) students each from Palestine and Yemen, (3 students, 3.7% from Afghanistan, 2 students (2.5 %) each from Chad, Libya, Somalia and Turkey. There was only 1 student (1.2 %) each from Albania, Algeria, Comoros, Eritrea, Guinea, India, Kazakhstan, Korea, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Sudan, and Uzbekistan. The students were from different levels of proficiency. 18 (22.2 %) of them were from Level 3 (low-intermediate), 33 (40.7 %) from Level 4 (high intermediate) and 30 (37.0 %) from Level 6 (Advanced). Most students have learned English as a subject in their education systems in their home countries except for a few who were from Indonesia (3), China (2) and one each from Chad,

Eritrea, Palestine, Saudi, Senegal, Uzbekistan and Yemen only started learning English in Malaysia.

### **Data collection and instrument**

Data were collected using one instrument which combines a rating scale and a writing task. The rating scale was a bipolar semantical differential scale used to elicit a graduated response about the value that participants place on different aspects of Malaysian English. There were four questions on the linguistic features of speaking skills: pronunciation, vocabulary, structure and speech rate. Phonology, lexis and syntax are three basic areas of a language. He and Li (2009) in analysing China English examined the same linguistic features in their studies. Speech rate is examined in this study as it has been found to affect intelligibility especially in heavily accented speech (Anderson-Hsieh & Koehler, 1988; Minematsu, Okabe, Ogaki, & Hirose, 2011; Jenkins, 2009).

Students were also asked about the degree of intelligibility, *nativeness* and acceptability of Malaysian English in the global context. Munro, Derwing, and Morton (2006) defined intelligibility as the speaker's capability to be understood by his or her listeners. The intelligibility of a speech has to come from the speaker's linguistic ability and the listener's ability. The accent is the difference between the expected pronunciation pattern and the speaker's pronunciation. *Nativeness* of an accent is an aspect easily identified as most native speakers are considered to come from the inner circle as mentioned by Kachru (1985). Acceptability for international communication could be defined as the extent to which these students can accept that the variety spoken by their English teachers is acceptable at the international level though they are not native speakers of English. The students were asked to grade the seven items on Malaysian English on a scale of 1 – 5. They were also asked to explain their answers, provide examples and write any opinions they had on Malaysian English variety used in the classroom.

### **Research procedure**

The students were given the consent form with the writing task immediately after their English Placement Test. They were asked to grade and write responses to the teachers' Malaysian English variety they encountered in English classes. The session took about 15 minutes to 30 minutes.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This study investigates the international students' view of the Malaysian English variety used in the classroom. The first two research questions dealt with the students' perspective of the Malaysian English variety used in the classroom on seven traits: speech rate, pronunciation, vocabulary, structure, intelligibility, *nativeness* and acceptability for global communication. The final research question asked whether views on classroom Malaysian English variety vary by nationality.

The students' responses to the traits were analysed using the means. The means were categorised as very high (4.3-5), high (3.5-4.2), moderate (2.7-3.4), low (1.9-2.6), and very low (1-1.8).

Figure 1 shows the students' ratings of the linguistic dimension of Malaysian English spoken in English classrooms.

It is clear from Figure 1 that the international students rated the Malaysian English variety used in their classroom positively. The means of all four linguistic items are in the high category. Of the four

items, vocabulary has the highest mean (4.27, SD=0.77) followed by structure (4.22, SD=0.91) and speech rate (4.10, SD=0.93). Pronunciation had the lowest mean (3.98, SD=1.07). Malaysian teachers are perceived to have better structural than pronunciation skills. These findings seem to resemble the findings by Alseweed (2012), Cañado and Madrid, (2004), Díaz (2015), Lasagabaster and Sierra (2002), and Reves and Medgyes (1994) that the non-native teachers were better at teaching grammatical structures than pronunciation.

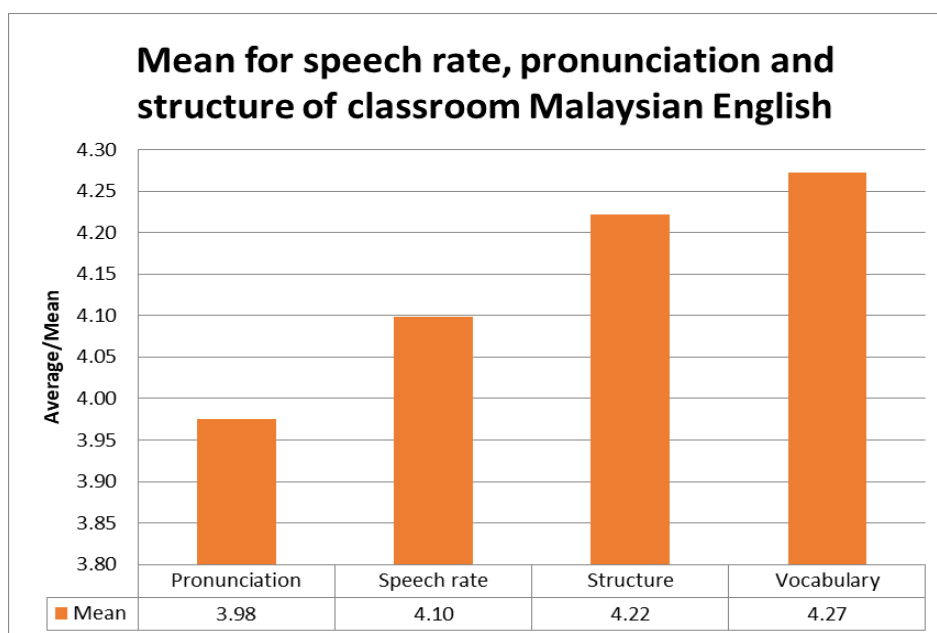


Figure 1. Means: pronunciation, speech rate, structure and vocabulary of classroom Malaysian English

Although NNESTs in Reves and Medgyes' (1994) study reported that they used less vocabulary, the students in this study rated the Malaysian teachers highly in their usage of vocabulary. Vocabulary usage was rated the highest among other linguistic traits studied. This may be related to the students in this study perceiving non-native teachers as being prepared in class and were more empathic towards students' language difficulties in vocabulary learning. Malaysian teachers in this university explicitly teach vocabulary through strategies which Sökmen (1997) categorises as "dictionary work", word unit analysis, mnemonic devices, semantic elaboration, collocations and lexical phrases, and oral production" (p. 64). As shown by the comments below, except for one student who wrote # 37 *Some words I can't understand*, the rest who commented on vocabulary stated that the vocabulary used is suitable for their needs with comments like

- #1 *They use a vocabulary suitable to our level at the same time they add some New vocabulary which is important to us to improve*
- #2 *regarding my level all the teachers use familiar word for my level.*
- # 23 *They try to avoid difficult vocabulary. They use simple and easy sentences.*
- # 45 *They used familiar vocabulary that I could understand. Even though they said something*

*unfamiliar words, they will explain to us the words that they said.*

# 48 *the vocab used by my teachers is great and easy to understand.*

Although there were two (2.5 %) negative comments from two students (# 37 *Some sentences, I don't understand*; #65 *Sometimes I face problems*), the students in general rated the teacher's structure highly, that is, around 4.22.

The good rating given to the structure of the teachers' spoken English is also supported by the positive comments given by 12 (14.8%) students for example,

- # 34 *Thank for teacher's every sentences explain*
- # 36 *I know what meaning of teacher said.*
- # 46 *the vocab used by my teachers is great and easy to understand. The sentences used by my teachers are good. Providing subject, v, o*
- # 56 *they are well educated, so they always use good sentences*
- # 76 *They use simple sentences. Although they taught me different kinds of sentence, I understand them.*

In terms of speech rate, Malaysian teachers' English was also rated highly. 4. 10 (16.0 %) students commented positively on speech rate for example.

- # 23 *My teachers' speech is very clear to me.*  
 # 29 *I can follow my lecturers when they speak English, but not very clearly sometimes.*  
 # 45 *They speak in the right speech rate. I could understand what did they said.*  
 # 46 *My teachers are speaking clearly and loudly*  
 # 63 *My teachers' speech rate is easy to us, so we can follow her quickly.*

Only two students (2.5 % ) gave negative comments, that is #37 *I don't understand;* #68, *so quickly.*

The rating on pronunciation which is the lowest among the linguistic items is also reflected in the comments, 15 students (18.5 %) who commented on pronunciation were divided in their views. 12 students wrote that Malaysian English is considered good enough to be understood in terms of pronunciation as shown by the following excerpts:

- # 8 *Sound and pronunciation are quite clear*  
 # 43 *I can understand but only some words that I didn't found I cannot. I think that they speak or talk quite slowly. Not so fast like European.*  
 # 54 *Firstly I didn't understand so few words, but now I can understand everything inshaallah.*

- # 73 *Frankly, my teachers' English is like a native because When I come here I cannot speak English, but they make me who I am today.*  
 # 81 *they explain until we understand*

Other students commented that some teachers have a noticeable Malaysian accent.

- # 3 *Some of the teacher his Malaysian accent affect on their speak*  
 # 29 *Some teachers, they have accent.*  
 # 36 *Some teacher's pronunciations is[are] Malaysian English*

The results show that international students, in general, have positive views on the spoken language of the Malaysian teachers. Their teachers' English was regarded as having adequate vocabulary and structure and reasonable speech rate and pronunciation. Perhaps the teachers' communicative strategy plays a role in the classroom as teachers usually put in an effort to ensure students understand their language. Figure 2 below shows the students' ratings of Malaysian English teachers' spoken language in terms of intelligibility, nativeness and acceptability for international communication.

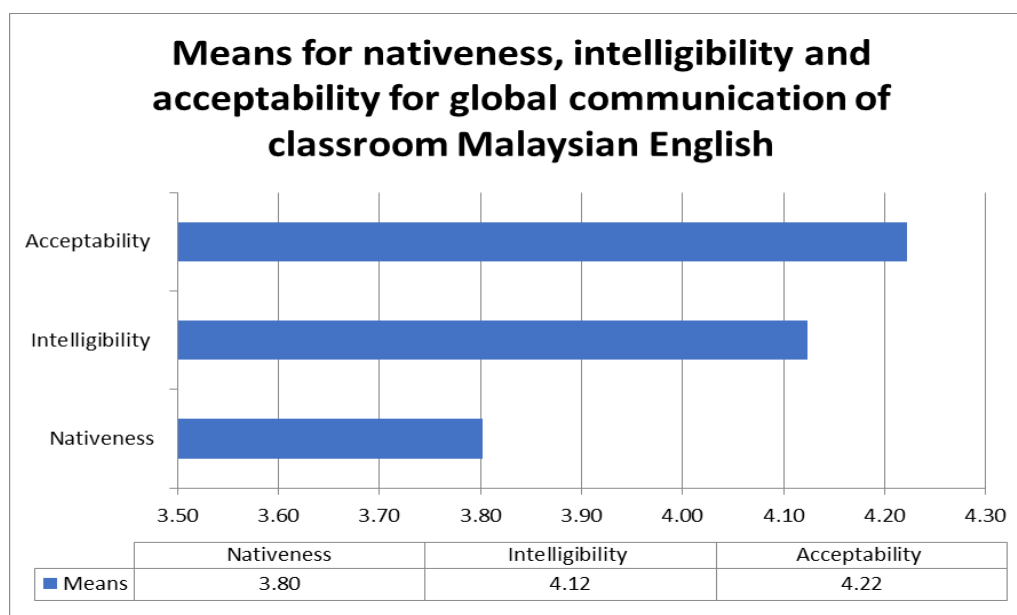


Figure 2. Means for nativeness, intelligibility and acceptability for global communication of classroom Malaysian English

Figure 2 shows that Malaysian English as spoken by English teachers in the classrooms has high ratings for intelligibility, acceptability for international communication and even nativeness although most Malaysian English teachers usually speak with a local standard accent. Figure 2 also shows that the lowest was for nativeness at 3.80 (SD=1.05). The mean for intelligibility, 4.12 (SD=0.94) was higher than that for nativeness. The mean was the highest for acceptability for international communication 4.22 (SD=0.92).

These students seem to have no problem accepting Malaysian English for global communication and intelligibility as shown by the mean exceeding 4.

Students' written responses are positive on the acceptability of their teachers' Malaysian English as shown below:

- # 3 *It is acceptability*  
 # 25 *They are very good in communication*  
 # 36 *It is acceptability*  
 # 37 *My teachers' English I can acceptability.*  
 #55 *Easy to communicate and be understandable to every one*

This finding is different from the findings by Tokumoto and Shibata (2011), who found that Japanese participants accept non-native varieties like Japanese English and Korean English for communicative



purposes in their countries but not for international contexts. The students in this study may place the value on the language's intelligibility rather than its pronunciation or accent.

According to Muniandy et al. (2010), although Standard British English is the linguistic model in Malaysia's education system, the benchmark for English here is more for function than for accuracy. As a result, Malaysian English is deemed as successful when it fulfils its communicative functions. Perhaps, for most of the international students too, it is not necessary for Malaysians to follow the native pronunciation as long as the communicative objective is achieved.

As for intelligibility, many of the international students found their teachers' English is clear enough to understand with responses like:

# 23 *Malaysian English is easy to understand.*

# 35 *I sometimes found it hard to understand when my friends speak in Malay English. It sometimes doesn't sound clear, may it because of the accent(?). But as long as I can understand, it's okay.*

# 43 *Malaysian English is good but In my opinion, their pronunciation is different. Sometime do not understand.*

# 56 *Malaysian English is bit similar to American. I more would like to learn British, as it's more understandable and clear.*

# 67 *First time it was difficult to understand the speak of Malaysian English, but now I can understand.*

As asserted by Murphy (2014), the intelligibility of a non-native speaker increases when he or she has better linguistic characteristics like rhythms, tones and rate of speech. The teachers may modify their speech in English language classes to suit the level of the students like EFL teachers in Japan who were reported by Saito and van Poeteren (2012) to have modified their phonological input features like speech rate to increase intelligibility for students in the classroom contexts. Malaysian English spoken by the teachers may contain certain linguistic features which bring about more comprehension to the students.

The good rating given to intelligibility could mean to suggest that the international students in this study would have no problem with the Malaysian accent although it is a non-native accent. Some students may face some difficulties initially with Malaysian English but it becomes better in time.

The mean for *nativeness* which is above average indicates the students' greater awareness that Malaysian English does not belong to the inner circle varieties, the accents commonly perceived as being native. The following written responses reflect this finding:

#3 *not very nativeness*

#36 *It's not very nativeness.*

#45 *Compare with native, they are good*

# 76 *They pretend like natives. And they are quite good.*

# 81 *My teachers can speak such as native*

The written responses show that many Malaysian English teachers spoke with a Malaysian accent although a few acknowledged that their teachers' English accents are quite close to the native varieties

most likely in comparison to either British or American English as students often have the stereotypical idea that native English are only American English and British English or Received Pronunciation. Participants in Kang's (2010) study, for example, considered only certain English varieties to be native, namely British and American pronunciation.

To find out if there is a difference in views among students from the different first language, analysis of ratings and responses from students who made up the majority of the international students surveyed were conducted. These students were those whose (L1) were Arabic (20, 24.7%) Bangladesh (11, 13.6%) and Chinese (18, 22.2%). Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations of the overall ratings of all the 7 items.

Table 1. Means and standard deviation: ratings of all linguistic and status items by Arabic, Bangladesh and Chinese

First Language	Means	Standard Deviation(s)
Arabic	4.00	1.04
Bangla	4.44	0.61
Chinese	4.07	0.73

Based on the means displayed in Table 1, the groups of students who rated their teachers' Malaysian English the highest is those whose L1 is Bangladesh (4.44). This is followed by students whose L1 is Chinese (4.07) and Arabic (4.00). Except for Bangladesh students who learn and speak English as a second language, the other two groups of students use English as a foreign language. Exposure to English should be greater in a second language context. The Bangladesh students may have better listening proficiency and thus have lesser problems adapting to Malaysian English. Perhaps the Bangladesh students are also better aware of Malaysia's colonial past. Like in Bangladesh, English is extensively used in Malaysia and has been nativised, so they may have a lower expectation for the Malaysian English variety to be close to a native variety in the different features examined. In contrast, other students from Arab speaking countries and China are not really exposed to Malaysian English variety. They may have different expectations of what Malaysian English should be like, to begin with, thus the overall difference in ratings with the Arabic and Chinese speaking students giving lower ratings to their teachers' English.

Although the ratings given by the two groups of students are lower than the rating given by the Bangladeshi students, the difference between them is small, and the ratings were still in the high category. With the general mean of about 4, Malaysian English spoken by the teachers can be said to be well accepted by the Chinese and Arabic speaking students too. Chinese students and teachers opined that English has an international status and acknowledged the importance of it to China's growth (He & Li, 2009). One respondent in He & Li's (2009) study strongly agreed that English is a valuable resource to gain

employment; he looked at the practical value of learning English. In this instance, the students may view Malaysian English as a good variety to learn since it is able to achieve that very practical purpose which is to communicate to the world in general. Meanwhile, in Arab-speaking countries, students are very reliant on their English teachers and preferred the traditional method of learning (Fareh, 2010). This is quite close to the Malaysian style of English teaching. Thus, Arabic speaking students may adapt quite well to Malaysian English spoken by their teachers.

Like the ratings, some comments were given by Bangladesh, Chinese and Arabic speaking students on their teachers' Malaysian English are positive. For example,

#1 *We have four teachers learned us English language. Two of them have a good accent but the other two use Malaysian accent when they speak. all of them have a good quality to learn but the problem only in their accent. (Palestine, Arabic)*

# 23 *My teachers' speech is very clear to me. My teachers' spoken are almost similar to my native (Bangladesh, Bangla)*

#62 *My teachers' speech is very beautiful and easy. It is very good for my study. (China, Chinese)*

All these findings support Moussu and Braine's (2006) study who found that Latin American students are very supportive of their NNESTs in terms of the willingness to learn from them and not seeing much difference between NNESTs and NESTs regardless of whether the teachers had the same Latin American background and L1 as the students or not.

## CONCLUSION

It is not always the case that ESL/EFL students get to learn from teachers from inner circle countries. Most students learn English from English teachers speaking a non-native accent. The present study was designed to find out how the Malaysian English variety used by teachers in the classrooms is viewed by ESL or EFL students of other nationalities. Other than four linguistic traits of English: speech rate, pronunciation, vocabulary and structure, three aspects of status dimension: intelligibility, nativeness and acceptability for global communication were also studied. For the linguistic dimension, the teachers were well rated for all items with pronunciation rated much lower than the other traits. As for the status of Malaysian English used in the classrooms, the international students were able to accept this variety as intelligible and suitable for global communication. The variety was rated the lowest for *nativeness* but the rating was still high, and some students saw the teachers' English accent as approaching close to the native variety for a few teachers.

Findings from this study shows that students are not so caught up with the 'native accent'. They are more concerned about learning the language and focus on the use of a language rather than on parroting a language.

This study has its own limitations. The students were foreign learners of English and have yet to master enough proficiency to attend courses at the university. They were unable to express themselves clearly in the written responses. Future studies should include more students with higher proficiency levels in order to get richer data. Future research should also consider the students' level of listening and language proficiency to see whether they have any relationship with the students' views of Malaysian English spoken in the classrooms. In general, the international students in this study seem to have had positive experiences with their teachers' Malaysian English variety with pronunciation and nativeness rated lower compared to other traits.

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## APPENDIX

### Writing Task

Dear students,

Good day. This writing task will be helpful in enhancing our understanding of your needs in the language classroom. Your response will only be used for academic purposes. Thank you very much for your time and opinions.

### Part 1: Demographics

1. Matric No: \_\_\_\_\_

2. What is your level of study in CELPAD? Choose ONE and tick (✓).

	LE 4000
	LE 0620
	LE 0520
	LE 0420
	LE 0320
	LE 0220
	LE 0120

3. What is your age? Choose ONE and tick (✓).

	18 or under
	19 - 23
	24 – 28
	29 or older

4. What is your gender? Choose ONE and tick (✓).

	Female
	Male

5. Which country are you from? Write it down.

\_\_\_\_\_

6. What is your first language? Choose ONE and tick (✓).

	Arabic
	Bangla
	Chinese
	Cambodian
	French
	Indonesian
	Malaysian
	Persian
	Thai
	Turkish
	Other:

What is the position of English as a language to you? You can choose more than ONE and tick (√).

<input type="checkbox"/>	First language
<input type="checkbox"/>	Second language
<input type="checkbox"/>	Foreign language
<input type="checkbox"/>	Education language
<input type="checkbox"/>	Business language
<input type="checkbox"/>	International language
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other:

7. In which country did you first learn English?

\_\_\_\_\_

8. Have your ever learned English in a native-speaking country? If yes, state the country.

Country: \_\_\_\_\_

Length of stay: \_\_\_\_\_

**Part 2: Writing Task**

Give your opinions about Malaysian English spoken by your teachers/lecturers.

1. My teachers are \_\_\_\_\_ to understand. Choose ONE and tick (✓).

Difficult	1	2	3	4	5	Easy

Explain your answer and provide examples.

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2. My teachers' speech rate is \_\_\_\_\_ to follow in the class.

Difficult	1	2	3	4	5	Easy

Explain your answer and provide examples.

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3. My teachers' pronunciations are \_\_\_\_\_. Choose ONE and tick (✓).

Unclear	1	2	3	4	5	Clear

Explain your answer and provide examples.

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4. The vocabulary used by my teachers is \_\_\_\_\_. Choose ONE and tick (✓).

Unfamiliar	1	2	3	4	5	Familiar

Explain your answer and provide examples.

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5. The sentences used by my teachers are \_\_\_\_\_ to me. Choose ONE and tick (✓).

Unfamiliar	1	2	3	4	5	Familiar

Explain your answer and provide examples.

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6. Please rate your teachers' spoken English in terms of nativeness. Choose ONE and tick (✓).

Non-native	1	2	3	4	5	Native

Explain your answer and provide examples.

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7. Please rate your teachers' English in terms of acceptability for global communication. Choose ONE and tick (✓).

Unacceptable	1	2	3	4	5	Acceptable

Explain your answer and provide examples.

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8. Give any other opinions/view you have about Malaysian English. Explain your answer and provide examples.

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Thank you ☺